

*Citrus sinensis*

[Synonyms : *Aurantium sinense*, *Citrus aurantium* var. *communis*, *Citrus aurantium* var. *sinensis*, *Citrus dulcis*, *Citrus macracantha*]

**SWEET ORANGE** is an evergreen shrub or tree. Possibly developed in China it has small, very fragrant, white flowers.

It is also known as *Ama daidai* (Japanese), *Apelsin* (Swedish), *Apel'sin* (Russian), *Apelsinträäd* (Swedish), *Apfelsine* (German), *Apfelsinenbaum* (German), *Apjelsin* (Russian), *Appelsien* (Dutch), *Appelsiini* (Finnish), *Appelsin* (Danish, Norwegian), *Appelsintrae* (Danish), *Arancia* (Italian), *Arancio* (Italian), *Arancio della Cina* (Italian), *Arancio dolce* (Italian), *Battavinarinja* (Telugu), *Blood orange*, *Blutapfelsine* (German), *Burtuqal* (Arabic), *Cam* (Vietnamese), *Cam ngot* (Vietnamese), *Cheng* (Chinese), *China orange*, *Chon* (Chinese), *Choreng* (Malay), *Chula* (Malay), *Citroník čínský* (Czech), *Citrónovník čínský* (Slovak), *Citruso Ĉinia* (Esperanto), *Coolie orange*, *Deshi suntala* (Nepalese), *Dodan* (Singhalese), *Guang gan* (Chinese), *Huang guo* (Chinese), *Jaffa orange*, *Jeruk manis* (Indonesian, Malay), *Kahel* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Kamala* (Bengali), *Kamala nembu* (Bengali), *Kamala tenga* (Assamese), *Kièngz* (Laotian), *Kittile* (Kannada), *Krôôch pôôsat'* (Khmer), *Laranja* (Portuguese), *Laranja-doce* (Portuguese), *Laranjeira* (Portuguese), *Laranjeira-da-China* (Portuguese), *Laringa helwa* (Maltese), *Limau manis* (Malay), *Madani* (Persian), *Makhun* (Thai), *Mausam suntala* (Nepalese), *Mchungwa* (Swahili), *Mozambique orange*, *Mucungwa* (Kikuyu), *Musambi* (Bengali, Hindi), *Naarangii* (Hindi, Urdu), *Nagarugam* (Tamil), *Nagaruka* (Sanskrit), *Nagarukam* (Tamil), *Narakam* (Malayalam), *Naranga* (Kannada, Sanskrit), *Narangi* (Arabic, Hindi, Urdu), *Naranja* (Hungarian, Spanish), *Naranji* (Telugu), *Naranjo* (Spanish), *Naranjo de la China* (Spanish), *Naranjo dulce* (Spanish), *Naran-kai* (Tamil), *Narenj* (Persian), *Naringi* (Gujarati), *Navel* (French), *Navel orange*, *Njugwa* (Kikuyu), *Orange* (English, German, French), *Orangenbaum* (German), *Oranger* (French), *Orange douce* (French), *Oranger à fruits doux* (French), *Oranger de Malte* (French), *Oranger doux* (French), *Orenji* (Japanese, Korean), *Peni-dodan* (Singhalese), *Pomarańcza* (Polish), *Pomarańcza słodka* (Polish), *Pomerančovník* (Czech), *Portakal* (Turkish), *Porteghal* (Persian), *Portokal* (Bulgarian), *Portokali* (Greek), *Portokaliá* (Greek), *Portugal orange*, *Sangtra* (Punjabi), *Sanguine* (French), *Sankis* (Visayan), *Santra* (Marathi), *Sathagudi* (Tamil), *Shamuti orange*, *Shina mikan* (Japanese), *Shonsi* (Burmese), *Sinaasappel* (Dutch), *Sinaasappelboom* (Dutch), *Slatka naranča* (Croatian), *Som* (Thai), *Suiito orenji* (Japanese), *Süssorangenbaum* (German), *Tapuz* (Hebrew), *Thanbaya* (Burmese), *Tight skinned orange*, *Tung chin thi* (Burmese), *Valencia orange*, and *Zoran'y* (Creole).

**See Also Bitter orange** (*Citrus aurantium*) as many of the names are interchangeable.

Oil is extracted from the seeds.

Warning – should not be taken internally if suffering from arthritis, or migraine. Oil of orange can cause dermatitis.

*Sinensis* means 'of or from China'.

Authorities note that three main types of sweet orange are usually identified today, namely, the blood orange, the 'normal' orange (most often represented by the Valencia variety) and

the navel orange. These are probably hybrids derived from species that may have been selected in China.

Some authorities state that there are references to the sweet orange that can be found in both Chinese and Indian texts from the period of about 100 BC to 100 AD. Ultimately familiar in many parts of Asia, records note a delightful ritual involving sweet oranges practised in relatively more recent times on the island of Java (now part of Indonesia). Apparently in 1618 the ruler's agent at one of the Javanese ports visited each Chinese ship upon its arrival bearing a gift of a basket of oranges – and two small umbrellas.

Although it is said to have been introduced to Europe initially in the first centuries AD, the sweet orange was little known on that Continent until the 15<sup>th</sup> Century when it is believed that it may have been brought from the East either by Genoese merchants or by the Portuguese – long after the, by then, well-established bitter orange (*Citrus aurantium*). Alternatively it may have been developed in the Mediterranean by the Arabs in the many orange groves in North Africa and Spain particularly. There are some authorities who claim that it was Portuguese Jesuit missionaries who wrote home in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century with news of the sweet orange, and Lisbon received the China orange tree from which today's familiar varieties are descended.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, no doubt initially inspired by the bitter orange tree (*Citrus aurantium*) originally grown by Eleanor of Castile, it began to be fashionable to raise orange trees in tubs and build orangeries in the more northern countries of Europe. This might have been satisfactory in Spain, but in cooler, less sunny climates the trees bore beautiful, scented blossom that rarely set and, when the trees did bear fruit these were not very successful. One of the most lavish orangeries was that at Versailles that was built for Louis XIV (1638-1715) to house orange trees grown in silver tubs. Despite these efforts though, sweet oranges for the Sun King's table had still to be imported from Spain and Portugal.

Sweet oranges were certainly commonplace in England by 16<sup>th</sup> Century Elizabethan times as it was the practice then for the crowds to throw oranges and eggs at each other as part of the May Day celebrations, and by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the fruit had become an unremarkable ingredient in the kitchen in many households. During that Century they were also a familiar part of the street cries of London. The English actress and mistress of Charles II, Eleanor or Nell Gwyn (c.1650-1687), just about survived as an orange girl in the metropolis before she proved herself as a comedienne on the boards at Drury Lane.

The orange crossed the Atlantic in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century first with the Genoese explorer, Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) and then with subsequent Portuguese traders. On his second voyage, Columbus is said to have planted the first orange tree in the Americas, actually in Haiti in the West Indies in November 1493. During the next fifty years the plant spread throughout the West Indian Islands and then reached the North American mainland. Orange groves were established in Florida. The first one was Spanish and flourished from 1579. But it was not until 1707 that an orange tree was planted in California on the other side of the North American Continent by a Spanish missionary, and this tree was not recognized at that time as the forerunner of today's modern orange industry. In 1848 when the flood of prospectors was building up during the California Gold Rush, the first large orange plantation was established in the State on the site of today's Los Angeles railway station. Diet was the last thing on these men's minds and as scurvy started to rampage citrus fruit farmers saw their own golden opportunity – as did doctors who also arranged for the importation of orange and lemon juice from Florida to meet the never dwindling demand. It is said that desperate prospectors were even prepared to offer a small can (sardine size) of gold dust, equal to about \$200 in those days, for a doctor's consultation and the orange or lemon (*Citrus limon*) juice prescribed. Many, many others

also jumped on this bandwagon, importing oranges to California from Mexico and as far away as Tahiti.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century a missionary in Brazil sent a cutting of a new variety of sweet orange which had appeared there – a navel orange – to the American Ministry of Agriculture in Washington. It was planted and subsequent cuttings taken, some of which were to arrive in California where they in due time bore fruit. These were called Washington Navel and are considered to be a landmark in the orange world.

Like other citrus fruit which ultimately appeared in North America, sweet orange became a source of food for several North American Indian tribes, including the Seminole, Hanaksiala and Haisla Indians – and, according to authorities, the fruit were especially prized by the Thompson Indians.

Perhaps it is hardly surprising that the State of Florida adopted orange blossom as a State emblem in 1909. After all this was where the trees were first introduced and established on the North American mainland.

Other varieties of sweet orange have been developed successfully elsewhere over the centuries, particularly in North Africa and South Africa. The famous brand name Outspan, comes from the latter and was so called in commemoration of the Dutch emigrant practice, *uitspan*. The word actually means ‘unharnessing’ and referred to the camp inside the protective circle of covered carts formed at night when newly-arrived Dutch settlers trekked through unknown territory and unharnessed their oxen to graze.

Although now fallen into disuse, sweet oranges were once central to an English tradition practised on Good Friday on the Downs at Dunstable. Children rolled the fruit down the hills there as a symbol, some said, of the stone being moved from the entrance to Jesus’ tomb.

The English literati have not overlooked the sweet orange. It is mentioned several times in the plays of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), including in *Much Ado About Nothing*, when Leonato’s niece Beatrice comments

The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil,  
count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

and in *Coriolanus*

You know neither me, yourselves, nor anything. You are ambitious  
for poor knaves’ caps and legs: you wear out a good wholesome  
forenoon in hearing a cause between an orange-wife and a fosset-  
seller, and then rejoin the controversy of threepence to a second day  
of audience.-.....

The metaphysical poet and clergyman, George Herbert (1593-1633), wrote (apparently in admiration of the tree’s fruiting ability)

Oh that I were an orange tree,  
That busie plant;  
Then should I ever laden be,  
And never want  
Some fruit for him that dressed me.

His peer the poet Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), described the fruit in glowing terms in *Song of the Emigrants in Bermuda*

.....The orange bright,  
Like golden lamps in a green night.

Then in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was to write

A fruit of pure Hesperian gold  
That smelled ambrosially .....

The culinary uses of the sweet orange are extensive and where in the past bitter oranges (*Citrus aurantium*) would have been used as an ingredient, today the sweet orange is substituted

on nearly all occasions (the preparation of marmalade is one notable exception although this can involve both bitter and sweet oranges).

Oranges were one of the foods relied upon by ships at sea, as well as by the later Californian Gold Rush prospectors, to provide a much-needed fresh source of Vitamin C as a scurvy preventative.

Today the fruit has wide and varied commercial use. Not unexpectedly they are a familiar ingredient used by the food and drink industries. They are also used however by the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries and, perhaps surprisingly by the chemical industry, not least in anti-freeze. Essential oil is also employed by the toiletry industry in the manufacture of soap.

***See Also*** Bitter orange (*Citrus aurantium*).